

14
UNITY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS.

SERIES XIV.

THE CHRISTMAS POEM
AND
THE CHRISTMAS FACT.

BY W. C. GANNETT.

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A Christmas Suggestion.

Some Sunday schools or classes may like for once to lengthen their Christmas Festival by spending a few Sundays preceding it upon the story of the Birth. This "Lesson" is rich in material for a number of Sundays, and will divide well into four parts by halving its first section at (3). The picture and story side of the subject will interest the little children; and the same side, with such wide views-off as are suggested in the art and history hints and in such notes as Nos. 5, 10, 11, 13, will interest even the oldest classes. The Christmas carols and legends will be enjoyed the more, though in a somewhat new way, in the light of such a study; and the danger that lurks in their careless use, that of teaching what will have to be untaught, will be better than avoided,—it will be *utilized*. The poetry which plays through history, especially religious history, is a vision worth waking early in the eyes: it saves us from so much near-sightedness.

But it will be impossible to use this material well without preparation. The whole text with the notes should be read first and slowly by any one who thinks of teaching it; and the best way then would be to obtain the pictures named and the four or five books of reference, and in a teachers' meeting study each Sunday's lesson together, with ample conversation, under some one's lead. The hours so spent might be remembered possibly among the winter's pleasantest. If several sets of the pictures were provided, the better for the class-work; they might be used afterwards as Christmas cards or on the Christmas tree. Only a very few pictures have been named. Soule's catalogue (see p. 8, below) is rich in all these subjects, and a large Christmas album could easily be filled from it. After this Christmas outing of five or six Sundays, the regular lessons could be resumed with all the heartier relish.

Let me add here, for those whom it concerns, that this little pamphlet is really Lesson V. of a series of twelve Sunday school lessons called "The Childhood of Jesus." I hope that the series, now long due to some very patient subscribers, will be finished and delivered complete in the latter part of the winter; and that the greater amount of material furnished will make amends, in part, for the long delay.

W. C. GANNETT.

September, 1883.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS,
OR
The Christmas Poem and the Christmas Fact.

LUKE II. 8-20.

As to the rose's petals pure
The rose's heart of gold
Was Nazareth to the encircling hills
In the brave days of old.

The narrow street, a straggling vine,
Against the hill-side clung;
And from its stem the village homes
In meagre clusters hung.

And down the street, with eager feet,
The village mothers came:
Let fancy follow without fear,
And listen void of blame.

A simple tale they have to tell,
The bubbling spring beside:
The like doth come a thousand times
By every time and tide.

No more than this,— enough of bliss
For Mary, mother mild,—
Upon her breast there lies at rest
A little new-born child.

Those little feet have errands long
For God and man to go;
Those little hands the chains must break
Of many a grinding woe.

But all of this to thee is strange,
As, safe from every harm,
Thou liest soft and warm and sweet
Upon thy mother's arm.

And little dream the village folk,
Upon the hill-side brown,
What wondrous fame their Jesus' name
Shall bring to Nazareth town.

J. W. Chadwick.

1. The Christmas Poem.

(1) *The Birth-Legends in our Gospels.*

When the children first find out who "Santa Claus" is, for a little while they are silent and disappointed; but soon they like it all the better that the gifts *do* come from Father and Mother and have the home-love in them;—and still they like to hang the stockings up and talk of Santa Claus and keep a bit of mystery and surprise about the Christmas. So with the Christmas story in the Gospels: when we find out what it really is, at first we may be dismayed and disappointed: afterwards we like it the better that Jesus *did* come into the world like any little brother;—and still, even in church, we like to read the story and sing the carols over, as Christmas day comes round.

The story lies there in the Gospels all a-shine with miracles and angel-glows. First, an angel comes to Joseph and to Mary separately and tells each that the little first-born shall not be Joseph's child at all,—it shall be only Mary's, born direct from the creative power of God; and it shall be Israel's long expected Savior. (Matt. i. 18-25; Luke i. 26-38.) Then a band of angels startle some shepherds by night with the same glad news, that their "Christ" is born; and the shepherds haste away to Bethlehem

village, near by, to find the babe lying in a manger. (Luke ii. 8-20. Will one of the class read or tell the story?) A few days after, two aged saints in Jerusalem recognize the babe as he is brought into the Temple, and thank God they have lived to see the "Christ." (Luke ii. 22-38.) Then "wise men" from the far east, signalled by a star, arrive at Jerusalem, bringing gifts for the little Christ-King; and the star travels in the sky to guide them. (Matt. ii. 1-12.) And then, to make sure of killing this little King of Israel, the old King on the throne sends and slays all the young babes in Bethlehem! But Jesus escapes because angels warn Joseph to flee with his family to Egypt, and when to come back, and where to live in safety. (Matt. ii. 13-23.)—So the angels in heaven rejoiced and the wide earth welcomed the Mighty Child, although a manger-cradle and a shepherd's greeting and an old man's blessing, and a sword, were all that his own people had to offer him!—These Gospel stories probably show what many believed about Jesus' birth sixty or seventy years after his death.

(See Hints 1, 2.)

(2) *The Birth-Legends in the Apocryphal Gospels.*

But the stories quickly grew longer and more wonderful. In books not admitted into the New Testament, but great favorites all the same with the early Christians,—in these later books each separate birth-miracle of our Gospels blossoms into a whole cluster of miracles. See what you think of these new stories; are they not pretty? are they likely? The birth-place, we are told, was a dark cave, which Mary's entrance lights as with a sun. At the birth-moment everything in Nature stops and hushes, spell-bound,—birds in the air with their wings outspread, laborers at their lunch with heads half-way lifted to their mouth, goats at the spring with necks half-bent to drink. When the child is born, the ox and ass, near by, kneel down and worship him. A voice is heard from the cradle, saying, "Mary, I am Jesus, the Son of God!" The shepherds' names are told us. Those wise men from the east become three Kings from three different quarters of the earth, Europe, Asia and Africa: one is old and white-haired, one swarthy and in mid-life, one a ruddy, beardless youth,—or else a negro, for the stories differ about him: their "star" spoke to them, and moved two years before them on their way, they needing neither food nor drink for all that while. The story of the journey into Egypt is a diary of the cures that the baby wrought and the homage paid to him: the idols fall to the ground before him, lions and dragons kneel, robbers are converted, roses spring up in his path, palm-trees bend their branches to offer him their dates, fountains break out to quench his thirst. All these stories of the baby-god are told in detail. And now his parents begin to catch from him the wonder-glow: Mother Mary's own birth is described as a miracle, and we hear much about her holy girlhood,—how, when three years old, she was taken to the Temple to be brought up, and on the third step of the altar the little

maid "danced with her feet, and all the house of Israel loved her"; and how pretty she was with her light hair and hazel eyes, and how she made her own clothes; and then about her betrothal, when twelve years old, to the widower Joseph,—this was another miracle. And at the other end of life, we have an Arabian Night's tale of Mary's glorious ascent to heaven, and the story of Joseph's death-bed,—this last as told by Jesus to his disciples. All these new stories were collected in half-doubted Gospels called *Apocryphal*, i. e. of "hidden" authorship, between 150 and 500 years after Jesus' death.

(See Hint 3.)

(3) *Birth-Legends in other Religions.*

But Jesus and Mary are not the only wonder-born children that we read of in the Bible, though none are born so wondrously as he. Remember the cradle-miracles of Isaac, Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist. (Gen. xvii.-xviii.; Jud. xiii.; 1 Sam. i.; Luke i.) In other lands and religions stories of wonder-birth are told about some of *their* heroes. The first few pages of the "Light of Asia" tell of another virgin-mother, with star-signs and angel-guards and dreams and grey-haired saint and bowing trees and springing flowers and gushing streams, and all the heavens and earth in jubilee over a little Savior of the world, born in India some four or five hundred years before Christ. They called him the "Buddha," and his religion fills central Asia as Christianity fills Europe. You had better read those pages in the "Light of Asia." Again, in the old Persian religion, Zoroaster, its founder, and Sociosh, the expected Savior, are both described as virgin-born. In China the people glorify their emperors by tracing back their family to such a miracle. In Greece and Rome, many heroes like Hercules and Romulus, and even Alexander and Cæsar, were accounted for by miracles of birth.

(4) *Why call them "Legends?"*

The Cæsar and the Buddha tales we call "legends." So too with those birth-stories in the Apocryphal Gospels. "Legends" are make-believe history,—fancies that have grown round some fact so closely that people think them real parts of the fact, like a vine grown round a tree till you can hardly tell what is vine and what is tree. Why not believe them? Because unlikely stories need best evidence, and these are very unlikely with very little evidence. And therefore, when we see how many such birth-stories there have been in different lands, we begin to think that perhaps in old times they just sprang up in people's fancy to glorify their heroes or account for them. And then we begin to wonder whether our Gospel birth-stories may not have sprung up in the self-same way, to glorify or to account for Jesus. That they could *grow* very fast when once started, the Apocrypha show: but may they not have *started* in fancy and be "legends," too? You can judge:—

Have you looked to see if Mark and John contain them? Is not that strange, if they were facts? Neither do the Acts nor the Epistles, though they exalt Jesus in many ways, ever allude to this greatest glory of all,—his wonder-birth. Nor do even Matthew and Luke ever again refer to it: and, on the contrary, they each take pains to trace his lineage up *through Joseph* to King David! (Matt. i.; Luke iii.) Do the neighbors seem to know anything about it? (Matt. xiii. 53-58.) Now, thinking it all over, which seems more reasonable,—to suppose *these* birth-stories alone true, and all the others like them untrue, or to suppose that they are all alike, and that the Gospel-stories are “legends” with the rest? Finally, if you notice how many of the incidents (see Matt. i., ii.,) hinge on some bit of Old Testament quotation, and remember what was said in Hint 3 of the last Lesson about love for twisted “Messianic prophecies,”—does not a light begin to break? Do you not see how some, at least, of these stories might easily have sprung up in Jewish-Christian fancy? (*Bethlehem*, Mic. v. 2.; *David's Son*, Jer. xxxiii. 15-17.; *Virgin-birth*, Is. vii. 14.; *Star and Wise Men*, Num. xxiv. 17, Is. lx. 3.; *Slaughter*, Ex. i., ii., Jer. xxxi. 15.; *Egypt*, Hos. xi. 1.; *Nazareth*, Zech. vi. 12.)

And now, if you are ready, say what you “judge.” “Bible fairy-stories,” a little girl called them, and that is a pretty good name for them. We suspect they sprang up in people's reverent fancy after Jesus' mother and brethren had all died,—soon after, or they would hardly have got into the New Testament at all,—and once up, *grew* and spread like those wild vines in the trees. And so we begin to read them much as we read old Greek legends of the hero-helper, Hercules, or old English legends of good King Arthur; not a bit more believingly,—only more lovingly, because they concern Jesus. For their poetry and romance, and as signs of old reverence felt for him, we are glad they found their way into our Bible,—but are glad, too, that we no longer think them true.

(See Hints 4, 5, 6.)

2. The Christmas Poem in History.

But most Christians still believe them true,—because they cannot yet bear to think that anything in the Bible is untrue. And in old times these birth-stories have played a great part in Christendom. They have made “Holy Places,” filled the churches with pictures, given plays for the theatre, brightened winter with the gladdest festival of all the year, and helped to shape the central doctrine of the Christian religion.

Holy Places.—Go to Nazareth and they will show you *two* spots—one for Greeks and one for Roman Catholics!—where Mary was standing when the Angel first greeted her. (Luke i. 28.) In a field near Bethlehem is a ruined chapel called “the Angel to the Shepherds;” and in the Bethlehem church, which is built over the holy cave, a silver star in the pavement marks the exact spot of Jesus' birth; and three steps farther in is the stall in which

the "manger" lay. But the wooden manger itself is in a church at Rome, where the Pope shows it every Christmas day! At Loretto in Italy you may see the very house in which Mary lived! It is of stone, 36 by 17 feet. It is visited by thousands of pilgrims every year. "How did it get there?" It was borne by angels over the sea some six hundred years ago! The crowned skulls of the "Three Kings" you will find in the cathedral of Cologne, enshrined in gold and gems,—where they "have performed divers great and glorious miracles." If people to-day can so easily believe in these "relics," how easily the stories themselves must have sprung up eighteen hundred years ago!

(See Hint 7.)

Pictures.—Each incident of the birth-stories has had hundreds of pictures painted of it. The Annunciation to Mary, and that to the Shepherds, the Child lying in the straw, the Adoration of the Magi, the Flight into Egypt, even the Slaughter of the Innocents, are stock-subjects of the Roman Catholic art. The churches and galleries abroad are full of them. The painters took to the Apocryphal Gospels for subjects, too. And the Madonna alone, or with her Child, is the great subject of Catholic art. Europe between 1400 and 1550 A. D., learnt to paint by trying to paint them. Have you not some picture of the Madonna and Child in your home?

(See Hints 8, 9.)

Plays.—Our modern drama grew out of the "miracle plays" and "mystery plays" and "morality plays" of the Middle Ages,—plays in which the Bible stories and the Saints' legends were *acted* before the people, of whom few then could read. These holy plays lasted nearly down to Shakespeare's time. The famous "Passion Play" still acted every tenth summer at Ober-Ammergau is a survival of that mediæval theatre. Look out "miracle play" in the Cyclopædia, and then read the one in Longfellow's "Golden Legend," Part III., if you would like to see the street-show which the children of five hundred years ago used to stare at.

Festivals.—Are you not glad the little Christ has his birthday kept, even if no one knows what day it was? "Dec. 25" was just a guess,—it must have been on *some* day, you know: and three or four hundred years after his death they chose this day because certain old heathen festivals fell about Dec. 25, which the Christians thought they would *christ-en* over for their own use,—thus saving their old jolly time while honoring their Christ. See if you cannot find out something about the *winter-solstice*; and *Mithra*, the Persian Sun-God; and the Roman *Saturnalia*; and the German *Yule-tide*. From the Germans come our Christmas greeneries and candles; from Holland comes Santa Claus (St. Nicholas); and the Christmas carols have been breaking out in many tongues for many a century of "Merry Christnases." Think, then, how many religions and lands have contributed their gladness

to our Festival of Peace and Good-will on Earth; while at the heart of it, for us, lie memories of Mary's little "Prince of Peace," cradled in the shining legends.

(See Hint 10.)

Doctrine and Worship.—Can his wonder-birth have much to do with Doctrine and Worship? A great deal: for you know most Christians think that Mary's boy was really the Almighty and Eternal God in baby-form, and the Gospel story of his birth somehow makes that idea seem truer to them. The Roman Catholics call Mary, right out, the "Mother of God," and as such they put her picture and image in their churches and worship her as a Mother in Heaven. A very helpful sort of worship it is, if we can not think of "Our Father in Heaven" as good and loving and mother-like. Theodore Parker often began his prayer in church, "Our Father and our Mother God," because he felt that God was Love as well as Power.

(See Hint 11.)

But now let us turn from the Christmas Poem to the Christmas Fact.

3. The Christmas Fact.

What do we *know* about Jesus' birth and family? Very little; but at least we can talk in "probabilities," instead of legends.

His father's name was "Joseph," and his mother's, "Mary." "In all the world that day there were probably not two more unimportant persons to all outward seeming." They lived in Nazareth of Galilee,—a place unnamed in either the Old Testament or Josephus: we never should have heard of it save for the boy there brought up. Probably the boy was *born* there, and not in Bethlehem, as all the signs except the legendary chapters point to Nazareth. And he was born, as well as we can judge, some four to eight years "B. C."; i. e., the year of his birth, when adopted in the sixth century as the Christian Era, was set that much too late,—so that A. D. 1882 should be A. D. 1886 to 1890. Of the day and month of birth nothing at all is known.

His parents called him "Jesus," a not uncommon name for boys then in that country. Another way of spelling it was "Joshua." A child's name at that time *meant* something, and the big J in a Bible name is very often the J of "Jehovah" hidden in the name: e. g., "John" (Jeho-hanan) means "Kindness of Jehovah;" "Judas" means "Praise of Jehovah;" "Jesus" or "Joshua" (Je-hoshua) means "Help, or Salvation, of Jehovah."

He had four brothers,—James, Joses, Simon, Judas,—and several sisters (Matt. xiii. 55-6); some of them possibly *half*-brothers and sisters, as the early Apocryphal tradition may be true which makes Joseph a widower and much older than his young bride, Mary. In that case we may think of children both older and younger than Jesus in the home.

Joseph was a carpenter by trade, so that the family was doubtless poor

David's royal blood may possibly have run in it, as the other old tradition says,—for a thousand years of ancestry gives very lowly households a chance for great relations: is there no "Mayflower" pilgrim among your forefathers? But that family-tree in Matt. i. and Luke iii. is a very gappy and contradictory tree! In a surer sense than that, however, we may believe that Jesus was of "noble blood." The noble son hints noble ancestors. Could we find out about his parents and grandparents for a hundred years back, we should probably find two or three humble heroes or heroines among them, brave, original, tender, spiritual,—marked men and women of the village circle.

This is not much, is it?, to "know"; and even this you see we have to strew with "probables." But this is more than we know of the birth and family of many another great world-helper.—And when we think again, and want to find birth-wonders *somewhere* to believe, are there not enough here? I can see three miracles! The miracle of every baby's birth; the miracle of every *great* man's origin; the miracle that Jesus' world-wide influence should have begun in a baby's smile in that humble carpenter's home in the village hidden among the Galilean hills. Three miracles,—real ones, too! Think them over a little while, and see if you want any more.

(See Hints 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.)

Hints for the Class Talks.

In General.—Consult Farrar, ch. i.-iv.; Geikie, ch. viii.-xi., and his notes to same; "Bible for Learners," ch. i.-v.; Chadwick's "The Man Jesus," ch. iii.; Mrs. Jameson's "Legends of the Madonna," or article on "Madonna" in Mrs. Clement's "Hand-book of Legendary Art." For pictures, send for catalogue of "Soule Photograph Co.," 338 Washington St., Boston: to get those suggested below, order by the names and numbers as quoted, stating size wanted, whether cabinet or medium, and whether to be mounted or unmounted: price, unmounted, 15 and 30 cts. each, according to size,—mounted, 20 and 40 cts.; per dozen, one fifth less.

Three to six Sundays for the Lesson. If possible, have a copy of the Apocryphal Gospels to show the class, and pictures for each legend.

Review Questions.—Which of our Gospels hold the birth-stories? What Gospels are an enlarged edition of these stories? When was the shorter edition written? When the larger one? The two prettiest stories in each? Who was Buddha? What about his birth? Do you believe the Buddha birth-stories? What is a legend? How do legends rise? What is the poet-faculty in us called? Is your little brother a poet? Are you one? What other sorts of stories are somewhat like legends? The difference between a fable and a fairy-tale? Between a fairy-tale and a legend? Then is there any truth hinted in the Buddha-legends? What is it? Do you think the Jesus birth-stories legends, or not? If one who believed them should ask you why you didn't, could you give your reasons? Let us hear them. What truth about Jesus is hinted by them? Which would you have preferred for this Lesson's title, "the Christmas Legend," or "the Christmas Poem"? Why?

In what five ways have the birth-legends entered into history? Which had you rather see,—the Nazareth hill-top view, or the spot where the Angel lighted to salute Mary? Which to you is the most beautiful Madonna picture? Would you like it on your church walls? Did you read Longfellow's Miracle-Play? How many old festivals can you name that helped to make our Christmas? What is the legend of St. Nicholas? Do you think they should have made-believe so about Santa Claus to you? What is "Epiphany" Sunday? Under

what name do Roman Catholics worship the Love of God? And the Evangelicals? And Unitarians? How did Theodore Parker begin his prayer?

Now for the Christmas *fact*: When was Jesus born? Where? Mother's name? Father's? The father's occupation? Brothers' and sisters' names? What does "Jesus" mean? And "John?" Where is their big J borrowed from? How many miracles are *sure* in Jesus' birth? Do they seem to you as wonderful as those told in the legends? How many of them belonged to *your* birth? What is a "law of Nature?" What is a miracle? Is it due to a broken or to an unknown law? What is *not* a miracle? What is *not* by a law of Nature? Did you learn Tennyson's little poem about the flower?

Hints for Conversation.

(1) **Gospel Birth-Stories.**—Describe an Eastern "inn" or khan, with its court-yard and "mangers;" shepherds in Palestine; Chaldean "magi,"—magic, magicians; sudden star-shinings, and travelling stars or comets, as omens; astrology. "We three Kings of Orient are." For all these points, see Farrar and Geikie. Read Milton's "Hymn of Christ's Nativity." For pictures the following are suggested from Soule's catalogue, in the "medium" size, if possible,—better study them well, before showing:—Annunciation to Mary. ("Andrea del Sarto, No. 11.")—Annunciation to the Shepherds. ("Rembrandt's Rare Etching, No. 3.")—Holy Night, by Correggio. ("A. 24.")—Adoration of the Kings,—very quaint. ("Fabriano, No. 1.")—Flight to Egypt, called Madonna della Scodella. ("Correggio, No. 1.")—Also, Flight to Egypt, by Knaus. ("A. 54.")

(2) **Sixty or Seventy Years after Jesus' Death.**—Matthew and Mark, in their present form, probably date not earlier than A.D. 90, and Luke not earlier than A.D. 100; some say considerably later. But all are doubtless compiled from earlier memoranda, and these from still earlier oral tradition. (Luke i. 1-4.) John probably dates from A.D. 130 to 150. ("Bible for Learners," vol. iii. pp. 27-33, and 709. Chadwick's "Man Jesus," ch. i.)

(3) **Apocryphal Birth-Stories.**—Read two or three short ones to the class and show pictures of the Presentation of the Virgin (Soule's "Titan, No. 8") and Marriage of the Virgin ("Raphael, No. 23.") Of New Testament Apocrypha there were many of all sorts.—Gospels, Acts, Epistles, Revelations. Some forty have survived. Of the Gospels, some pieced out the story of Jesus' death, others that of his birth and childhood. Chief among these "Infancies" were the "Gospel of James" and that of "Thomas,"—spurious children fathered on apostles, just as, in the Old Testament Apocrypha, "Daniel," "Enoch" and "Solomon" were fathered on Old Testament worthies. (See p. 23, above.) "James" tells many details of Mary's birth, girlhood, marriage and Jesus' birth. "Thomas," many details of the boy from five to twelve years old. Note how these stories *grew*: (1) Our short Gospel-tales; (2) "James" and "Thomas,"—wild second-century expansions of those tales; (3) later and still wilder expansions of "James" and "Thomas." Note, too, the growing coarseness. These "Infancies," developing the Matthew and Luke hints, represent the imagination of the less educated class among the early Christians,—their grotesque conception of how a God-Child would be born and would behave; while that of the more educated was based with the relations of the Heavenly Powers to each other,—developing the hints in John i. 1-18 into "Trinity and "Incarnation" doctrines. By 400 or 500 A.D. *both* sorts of speculation were popular with *all* classes.—As to the way in which our present Gospels and Epistles were gradually sifted out from all the claimants for Bible-honors, see "Canon" in Cyclopædia.

(4) **You Can Judge.**—Other points, like the differing genealogies, the mistakes about the taxing, the complete wrenching of the prophecies from their real meaning, might be noticed.—Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto the Bible as "judges;" because, even with the wisest scholars, Bible criticism is three-quarters common-sense to one-quarter scholarship; and also because, in our day, the Bible can be revered only after being "judged." Teach frank judging from the outset, and, afterward, flippant judging will seem silly instead of witty.

(5) **Legends.**—A good talk might open here, if the teacher prepares for it.—What is a

"legend," and how does it rise? Two ways of stating any fact in Nature, history, life,—the poet's way, and the way of the historian or man of science. The two latter try to state it exactly as it is. The poet, using his "imagination," states it in symbols; he personifies and dramatizes it, sometimes with much detail. "There is a Defoe in every age and race: it is the popular imagination." But imagination is often *unconscious*, and so men mistake their symbols for realities; e. g., myth, legend, fairy-tale, folk-lore,—all these forms of poetry were no fiction, but "science" and "history," to primitive people. Savages and children are still poets of this unconscious kind, and few of us but have a savage, a child, lingering in them. "Is every man a poet, then, without knowing it?" Yes. "A legend-maker?" Yes,—what else is half the gossip?—*Conscious* imagination, on the other hand, uses symbols knowing them to be symbols, e. g., metaphor, fable, parable, allegory; and we all are poets that way, too—Many kinds of "poems," then: by questions and examples try to get the children to distinguish the eight kinds that have been mentioned: it will help to make them realize how very large a part of life "imagination" rules, and how much of so-called "history" and "science" it has invented. But take care to point out that, since imagination usually tries to state a fact, the myth, legend, etc., often hide and hint some real truth worth investigating. Finally, ask if there are not some truths which can *only* be stated in symbols, whether the thought of "God" is not a "poem" of this kind,—whether religious ideas are not always half poetry. (Consult Tylor's "Anthropology," ch. xiv., xv.; and his "Primitive Culture", vol. I., ch. viii., ix., x.; and the chapter on "the Mythical Element in the New Testament" in Hedge's "Ways of the Spirit.")

(6) **More Lovingly.**—The maxim "Tender and True" applies to our treatment of all idealizations,—others' or our own. A shame to be untender,—a greater shame to be untrue in order to be tender. Holmes's sentence about Emerson: "Here was an iconoclast without a hammer, who took down our idols from their pedestals so tenderly that it seemed like an act of worship."—Are you glad these legends are in your Bible? Why? Why are people afraid to think the Bible is not all true?

(7) **Holy Places.**—See Geikie and Farrar, but especially Stanley's "Sinai and Palestine," ch. xiv.

(8) **Pictures in Churches.**—Don't you wish there were some in yours? What sort would you have? What would be "holy subjects" for to-day?

(9) **The Madonna-Face.**—Would you like it for your mother's? Have several Madonna pictures, if you can,—among them, the Sistine Madonna (Soule, "Raphael, Nos. 2 and 3."); "Andrea del Sarto's, No. 5;" "Muller's, A. 55". (Why not use these and Knaus' Madonna, "A. 54", for your Christmas cards next winter?) Which Madonna is your favorite? National types of Madonna-face. Ideal faces and real faces. An artist's ideal face usually somebody's real face,—the face he loves best; his wife's perhaps. The *one* face of Leonardo da Vinci, of Andrea del Sarto, Rubens, Boughton, Roger's statuettes, etc. Look at Jalabert's "Raphael in his Studio" (Soule, "A. 92.")

(10) **Christmas.**—Should you say that the birth of Jesus was, all things considered, the most important event in the whole course of human history? Show how the Festival of his birth has become the largest Festival of Human Brotherhood. It blends Past, Present and Future,—old poetic memories, present cheer and kindness to all, prophecies of the peace and love that will be on the earth as the song of the angels slowly becomes the aw of the nations. Birthday of Christianity rather than of Christ. Speak of Christmas Carols: which one does the class love best? Which of our Four Festivals,—Christmas, Easter, Flower and Harvest,—does the Sunday School enjoy most? Tell the legend of good St. Nicholas. (See Mrs. Clement's "Handbook of Legendary Art.") Is it well to make believe about "Santa Claus" to the little children? What do *they* think, when they find it out? What does "Epiphany" celebrate? (See Cyclopædia.)

(11) **Madonna-Worship.**—A story in three chapters: (1) Mary, the carpenter's wife and Jesus' mother,—(2) The "Mother of God," a fifth-century being, originating in

the theologic war over the Incarnation-dogma. Fourth-century Christianity had decided that God was tri-une, and that Christ was God-Man; the next three centuries were spent in deciding the relations between these two natures of Christ, and it was then that *Theotokos*, "Mother of God," became the war-cry of the Orthodox. The heretics held that Mary was mother only of Christ's human side,—not of his God-side. No, said the Orthodox,—Mary was "Mother-of-God." This idea was specially popular in Egypt, where the old heathen religion had made the natives familiar with statues of the goddess Isis holding her infant son Horus in her arms.—(3) As time passed on, this theologic "Mother of God" rose, herself, into a *Mother-God*,—nearer and more real than the unseen and unknown "Father," gentler than that dreaded Judge, the "Son." The Middle Age Chivalry increased her power over hearts; she became the *Madonna*, "Our Lady." Since then she may almost be called the chief divinity of the Roman Catholics: but that is simply saying that Catholics worship under her name the Goodness of God, as Evangelicals worship the same Goodness, calling it "Christ who died for us,"—as Unitarians worship the same Goodness, calling it "Our Father",—and as still others worship it, calling it the "Moral Law in Nature."

Much food for thought and talk in this three-chaptered story of a goddess's growth; for the Madonna is a good type of all historic idealizations. "Personality" is the fulcrum, but "Idealization" is the lever, of the world's history. *Because* unhistoric Mary can mount what thrones we will, and we can have whatever details of her personal history a loving fancy wants. In exactly the same way the Jesus-ideal, and the God-ideal, find room to grow forever. It all shows the imperial power of the Imagination.—Speak of the helpfulness of "Symbols" in doctrine, and the bigotry of insisting on this or that particular symbol as "the Truth."—Compare this Christian goddess with ancient goddesses; Venus was Beauty, Juno was Majesty, Minerva was Wisdom, Vesta was Purity, etc.; the Madonna is the All-Womanly, or Love as its essence: a witness of the world's rise in Christianity. (Consult the Introduction to Mrs. Jameson's "Legends of the Madonna;" and Robertson's "Sermons," vol. ii. 261-293, and his "Life," vol. ii. 197.)

(12) **Names.**—Think of it! Every John and Jane,—every Johnson, Jones and Jennings, "John Bull" and "Brother Jonathan," all getting their J from the great Jehovah's name! Why do we say "John Bull" and not "Wm. Bull?" What makes "John" and "Mary" the common names,—and in so many languages?

(13) **Miracles.**—A "miracle" simply means a *marvel* or *wonder*. But the word is used of wonders happening (1) through so-called *known laws* of Nature, e.g. snow-flakes, flowers, sun-sets; (2) through *unknown laws* of Nature, e.g. cures wrought by faith and laying on of hands; (3) through some Power supposed to *break the laws* of Nature, e.g. raising the dead, and most of the Bible-miracles as believed in by most churches. Can the children see that the first kind of miracle always runs into the second kind? and that, for aught we know, the third kind also, may always belong with the second? Can they think of anything in Nature which is *not* a miracle in that second sense?—But why not just the other way,—all the miracles of "unknown law" be really miracles of "broken law?" Because Science, in exploring the unknown, finds Law, Law, Law,—Law everywhere, never anything but Law; it finds a thousand seeming breaks or exceptions, but each one, when investigated far enough, invariably turns out to be the mere entrance to some fresh tract of Law, before unknown.

Now let the older children think a little while over some hard-easy questions: If, through "miracle" or "special providence," Nature's laws kept breaking, could we ever learn to *know* Nature? Or ever *trust* her as we now do? Or ever *master* and safely *use* Nature? So, (think slowly!), if the laws broke now and then to spare men pain, would we, on the whole, really be as *free* as we are now under the unbreaking laws? Then the fixedness, the Fate, in outside Nature seems to be the very condition of man's Freedom, does it not?

If *Moral Law* goes through and through these matter-laws, would not that fill Nature *full of Right*? Do you believe it *does*? Is your trust in the Moral Law as firm as your trust in the matter-laws? Does one faith grow into the other? Is trust in matter-laws and Moral Law (in the Eternal Order and Eternal Goodness, let us call it,) the same as trust in God? Why

do the churches think they prefer to believe in broken laws? Does it show less, or greater, trust in God to believe that Nature's laws never warp or break? Does it not all come to this, —There is but one **Miracle**, and that is, Nature! Emerson's sentence: "The word **Miracle**, as pronounced by Christian churches, gives a false impression: it is **Monster**. It is not one with the blowing clover and the falling rain." Holmes's sentence about Emerson himself: "A person who by force of natural gifts is entitled to be called a personage is always a surprise in the order of appearances; sometimes, as in the case of Shakespeare, of Goethe, a marvel, if not a miracle." Read, or still better, learn, Tennyson's little poem called "Flower in the crannied wall." (Consult Tyndall's essay on "Miracles and Special Providences," in his "Fragments of Science;" and Lecky's ch. ii. on the "Declining Sense of the Miraculous," in his "Rationalism in Europe.")

(14) **Three Miracles.** — Let the children try to count a dozen every-day "miracles" that happen in their own life or home. — The baby: its wonder of limb and brain; of waking senses; of mind, heart, conscience, all asleep, but *there*; of their slow waking up as the months go by; of its face, already dimly resembling whose? of the love all waiting in the world to nest the little stranger in, when it appears. Read Geo. Macdonald's verses, "Where did you come from, baby dear?" — The great man's origin: the mystery of the ten talents and the one; bequests at birth; is it by any accident that half the apples sometimes come on one bough of the tree? What two elements besides the birth bequests go to make up "greatness"? — A baby's smile, and a mother's joy above it, becoming the man's power to shape history and make the gladness of a world! The radiation of influence; mankind knit together, each to all and all to each; spiritual telegraphy; the unseen force flashing as thought, feeling, character, from eye to eye, heart to heart, life to life, book to book, nation to nation, and down the generations and the centuries. Read J. W. Chadwick's poems about children, "In Nazareth town," etc.

(15) **Power of Imagination.** — The lesson might begin or end thus: What do the children "imagine" that next Christmas will bring them? Or that the new teacher is like? That the Tower of London is like? That Heaven is like? That is the power of "Imagination" in them: now it is *that very same power*, acting though millions of men and hundreds of years, which has shaped and colored History in the wondrous ways of which this Lesson speaks.

(16) **These Verses** fit our Lesson pretty well. They are about your little brother or sister, and are called—

"CHRISTMAS."

Still the angels sing on high,
Still the bearded men draw nigh,
Bringing worship with the morn,
When a little child is born;
Baby-glory in the place,
Star-look on the mother's face,
Psalm within the mother's heart,—
Christmas all in counterpart!

Quaintest wight that ever stirred,
With thy ears that never heard,
Eyes that eye a brand-new world,
Tiny limbs but half uncured,
Wee-bit Adam! Wee-bit Christ!
Earth, by thee new-paradised,
Blooms to miracles again,
Echoes God's "Good Will to men!"



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